EYES ON THE STREETS

Boston plugs residents with iPhones directly into its CRM system

The Boston iPhone app automatically locates service requests on a map, and users can submit photos to show the problems they report.

In October, Boston introduced the first app for city service requests that allows residents to report potholes, graffiti, broken streetlights and other public problems from their Apple iPhones. The Mayor's Office and the MIS Department started working on the app last March, after the city's citizen request management (CRM) system from Bethesda, Md.-based Lagan had for two years been automating requests for service for the parks department, the department of transportation and public works. Through the city's relationship with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Media Lab, city staffers learned about Connected Bits, a local company that develops iPhone apps. The city began working with the company to develop an app that would extend the capabilities of the CRM system to iPhones.

Over the next few months, a small team developed the system for the most common service requests, enlisted residents to test it, and then submitted it to Apple to include in the iTunes store as a free download. The app is hosted on the city's virtual servers and connected directly to the CRM system. When a resident opens the app on an iPhone, his or her location is automatically identified on a map. The resident can create a new report about graffiti, a pothole, a broken streetlight, or other request. The system prompts users to add a photo, automatically records the location of the item, and includes a field for residents to write a description of the problem. They can submit the request anonymously or fill in their contact information. If they want to talk to someone at the city hall call center, they can call from the app. Service requests are automatically added to the work queue of the appropriate service department. Residents can follow the progress of their requests in real time, and they are alerted when a ticket is closed.

Within the first three months of the launch, the app was downloaded more than 4,000 times and used to submit more than 800 cases in the city's CRM. It takes the city four days on average to resolve a case.

Boston is working on the next generation of features for the app, and it plans to develop more apps based on resident feedback. "The release of the Citizens Connect iPhone app has been a wildly successful experience for our citizens to date and an inspiration for additional ways to integrate better with our community," says Nigel Jacob, senior advisor for emerging technology.

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Project: **iPhone app for service requests**

Jurisdiction: **Boston**

Departments: **Mayor's Office and MIS Department**

Vendors: **Bethesda, Md.-based Lagan; locally based Connected Bits**

Date: **October 2009**

Cost: **$25,000**